

Kansans Supporting Veterans - Past, Present

November 11th, we observe Veterans Day to honor those who have served our country in the military and protected our way of life. Kansans can be proud that our state has a long history of supporting our country's veterans in gratitude for their service. These stories have and will continue to inspire people of our state, and nation, to do great things for those who sacrifice on our behalf.

The Veterans Day holiday was founded by one of Kansas' own. Alvin King, of Emporia, proposed that Armistice Day be changed to recognize and honor veterans from all wars and conflicts, not just World War I. Kansas Congressman Ed Rees introduced a bill creating the holiday. In 1954, President Eisenhower, a native of Abilene and one of the most admired military leaders in our history, signed the legislation proclaiming Veterans Day.

In December 1943, a Topekan crafted the Servicemen's Readjustment Act - also known as the GI Bill of Rights. Harry Colmery, attorney and past national commander of the American Legion, authored the GI Bill which forever changed American history. Over 60 years later, as a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I was honored to continue Colmery's mission by supporting a "21st Century GI Bill," providing enhanced education benefits to veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

More recently, a group of American Legion Riders from Mulvane in 2005 was the first to respond to hateful demonstrations taking place at U.S. service members' funerals. These members of the "Patriot Guard" shielded military families from protesters, leading to a nationwide movement that has allowed grieving families the peaceful time of mourning they deserve.

Our state's honorable tradition continues in present time. One example is retired Army Colonel Gary LaGrange of Manhattan, who created "Help us Learn...Give us Hope" (<http://www.helpuslearngiveushope.org/>). This organization collects and sends school supplies, including books, to U.S. service members who distribute them to Iraqi and Afghan school children. First requested by a Big Red One soldier in Baghdad in 2008, to date, over 260,000 pounds of educational materials have been collected from Kansans and sent overseas. Illiteracy rates as high as 90 percent among Afghan women threaten the future of these countries and our mission there. "Help us Learn...Give us Hope" is making a difference in winning hearts and minds while helping children toward a brighter future.

King, Colmery, the Patriot Guard, and LaGrange are just a few examples of many etched in our Kansas history that have shaped our country's gratitude for American veterans. May we continue to fully support our veterans and the thousands now serving in uniform who work each day to secure our country and our freedoms.